

THE NATIONAL FIRE INCIDENT REPORTING SYSTEM AND THE STATE OF ALABAMA: JOINING THE RANKS

Strategic Management of Change

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ABSTRACT

Today's fire service operational environment is framed within the phrase, "do more with less." The general public is expressing a strong desire for additional services from the public sector, but at the same time there is a great restraint on the part of the general public to consent to an increase in taxes to support additional services.

It is during these times especially that quick access to pertinent information proves to be invaluable. After all, it is with information that the administration and management teams set strategic direction for the organization.

The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) was developed as a mechanism to provide commonality of reporting information. Currently there are forty-two states and the District of Columbia that report using the NFIRS. The State of Alabama does not. The problem which faces the City of Mountain Brook, Alabama Fire Department as well as the other one thousand fire service agencies within the state is how to move Alabama's fire service toward the adoption of the NFIRS so that local data can be reported to the National Fire Data Center.

The purpose of this research was to determine the issues surrounding the feasibility of getting the State of Alabama to officially adopt the NFIRS as the state fire service reporting system of choice, and to chart a course of action to bring about its implementation.

Primarily using descriptive research methods, this research will answer the following questions:

- **What problems have other states faced with respect to becoming a contributing member of the National Fire Incident Reporting System?**
- **What do the over one thousand fire service agencies within the State of Alabama think about the issue of reporting statistics using the NFIRS?**
- **Will there be affirmative unanimity among the paid, volunteer and combination departments toward the proposed adoption of NFIRS?**
- **Will other stakeholders support or oppose the project?**

This project involved primarily descriptive research utilizing existing data/material from the research of others coupled with local data supplied via a state-wide survey which involved over 1000 fire departments. Analysis derived from the state survey instruments revealed that Alabama's fire service was ready to join the NFIRS. The survey information ran parallel to survey data reported from the State of Maine.

Project recommendations were:

- that stakeholders share the lessons learned from other NFIRS states such as the State of Maine, so that the same mistakes will not be repeated; and
- that the system be fully computer integrated so that fire department data can be sent to the State Fire Marshal via modems or mailed floppy disks; and
- that no hard copy data be accepted from fire service agencies; and
- that there not be a mandate for all state fire service agencies to join, and
- that the USFA and NFIC be involved and utilized in the Alabama program development, and
- there should be a marketing plan espousing the benefits of the NFIRS.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's fire service operational environment is framed within the phrase, "do more with less." The general public is expressing a strong desire for additional services from the public sector, but at the same time there is a great restraint on the part of the general public to consent to an increase in taxes to support additional services. The fire service in general, including the Mountain Brook, Alabama Fire Department, has not escaped this phenomenon and has been faced with the administration and management of an expanding mission with monetary resources which are not commensurately available.

During these austere times, chief officers must use all available means at their disposal to garner resources so that the mission of the organization can be met at the level desired by both the department and its customers. It is during these times especially, that quick access to pertinent information proves to be invaluable. After all, it is with information that the administration and management teams set strategic direction for the organization. It can therefore be stated that pertinent, timely and credible information is perhaps the key ingredient in charting a course for the organization.

One of the greatest resources of information for a fire service organization is information from other fire service agencies. This is especially true for fire service agencies that are geographically similar or adjacent, or those agencies which are demographically similar. Shared information through bench marking with these organizations becomes a highly effective tool for setting standards or justifying programs and projects.

In order to take advantage of bench marking and sharing information on a local, state and national level, it is important that information be gathered and reported in a common fashion. For example, a dumpster fire in one city should be reported in the same fashion as a dumpster fire in another jurisdiction. We can then quantify the “dumpster fire problem” , draw comparisons between jurisdictions and establish programs to alleviate the problem. Without this commonality of reporting, there can be no measurable comparisons between local departments or an accumulation of a national data base.

The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) was developed as a mechanism to provide commonality of reporting information. Currently there are forty-two states and the District of Columbia that report using the NFIRS. The State of Alabama (with the exception of the Birmingham Fire Department) is not one of the reporting states. The problem which faces the City of Mountain Brook, Alabama Fire Department as well as the other one thousand fire service agencies within the state is how to move Alabama’s fire service toward the adoption of the NFIRS so that local data can be reported to the National Fire Data Center.

The purpose of this research was to determine the issues surrounding the feasibility of getting the State of Alabama to officially adopt the National Fire Incident Reporting System as the state fire service reporting system of choice, and if feasible, to chart a course of action to bring about its implementation.

Primarily using descriptive research methods, this research will answer the following questions:

- **What problems have other states faced with respect to becoming a contributing member of the National Fire Incident Reporting System?**
- **What do the over one thousand fire service agencies within the State of Alabama think about the issue of reporting statistics using the NFIRS?**
- **Will there be affirmative unanimity among the paid, volunteer and combination departments toward the proposed adoption of NFIRS?**
- **Will other stakeholders support or oppose the project?**

A review of historical and current literature and text regarding fire incident reporting within the State of Maine, literature regarding the NFIRS and the application/analysis of a state-wide survey will form the basis of the specific information within this research project.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Focal Point:

As a matter of record, the United States Fire Administration (USFA) does not wish to accept fire incident data from individual departments within each state. The USFA would rather there be a “focal point” identified within each state which could serve as the data collection point for the entire state’s fire service. The office of the state fire marshal in the vast majority of the states that do report using the system serves as the state collection point. This arrangement serves two very important purposes: it assists the state fire marshals with their informational needs for identifying the state/local fire problem which leads to the development of fire safety programs and provides budget justifications, and it

provides a logical channeling process for fire service information to reach the national level at the USFA.

A Dead End:

The City of Mountain Brook Fire Department utilizes a computer networked fire department management information system. At the heart of the system is an incident reporting module which is NFIRS based. The department has approximately five years of historical data archived in the NFIRS format. Since the State of Alabama does not capture fire/EMS incident statistics or report the statistics to the USFA, the information which has been captured serves no useful purpose other than to define fire service delivery within the city limits of Mountain Brook.

Value of NFIRS:

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has published a document which clearly describes the benefits of belonging to a nationally inclusive fire service reporting system and why it is important for the Mountain Brook Fire Department as well as the entire State of Alabama to become a part of this program. The document is entitled, *Uses of NFIRS*. Below are some of the uses for the system presented at the local, state and national levels:

Local: ...an important advantage is that local fire departments can compare their own productivity and effectiveness with the state average. They can also seek out statistics on fire departments in communities similar to their own and conduct comparisons. Identification of trends in the number of calls to the fire department, the types of calls made, and the origin of calls can be tracked. This information can

be put to use for example in planning the location of fire stations. Budget justifications can be enhanced via the NFIRS information because it allows the department to count specific types of incidents which can then be translated into equipment or personnel redeployment if necessary.

State: Perhaps the most fundamental use of NFIRS is in understanding the nature of the fire problem. One indicator of the usefulness of the system is its utilization by State Fire Marshal's offices in preparing their annual reports. Many states, such as California, Maryland, New York and Texas, use their local NFIRS as the basis for the majority of the content of their annual reports.

National: The United State Fire Administration used the NFIRS for many purposes. Among these are:

- prioritizing the many fire issues extant in the U.S. and setting agency goals and objectives;
- identifying aspects of the fire problem that require continued monitoring, additional research, or administrative action;
- Preparing Congressional testimony and justifying budget requests to support the work of the USFA;
- facilitating agency management reviews based on performance based budgeting; and
- providing a means of measuring the impact of agency programs and activities (*Uses of NFIRS*, pg 3-6).

Based on the benefits of being involved in the NFIRS and the necessity for a focal point, it would seem that the logical plan for the Mountain Brook Fire Department incident response data to get assimilated into the national fire service data base would be to get the entire State of Alabama fire service to adopt the NFIRS program.

The Dynamics of Change:

Moving toward NFIRS would represent a significant change for the State of Alabama fire service. As a fire service executive, my role in helping to bring about this change would require the adoption of certain behaviors as stated in the *Strategic Management of Change* student manual. The manual states;

...the fire officer must adopt certain behaviors. The executive fire officer must be a communicator, which includes frequent and open communication, as well as listening. During a change the fire officer needs to discuss the process with everyone, recognize other people's concerns, and diffuse any rumors about the change being an "us against them" conspiracy.

Executive fire officers must also assume the role of "collaborator" (using teams) which allows the involvement of others and opportunity to gather their input and suggestions, and provides them with a sense of ownership in the process.

In addition, the executive fire officer needs to act as a demonstrator, providing a model for other individuals to follow. By modeling the expected behaviors, the executive fire officer sets an example and illustrates his/her involvement in the process.

Finally, the executive fire officer must serve as an educator. Educating everybody about the purpose, reasons, and effects of the change promotes an understanding of the larger picture, especially by those individuals who might only see the change as a nuisance (SM 1-6 & 1-7).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The National Fire Incident Reporting System represents the best efforts of the fire service at establishing commonality of incident and response data reporting. The Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 authorized the National Fire Data Center in the USFA to gather and analyze information on the magnitude of the nation's fire problem as well as its detailed characteristics and trends (What is NFIRS, 1997). The NFIRS was formed with two objectives in mind: to help State and local governments develop fire reporting and analysis for their own use, and to obtain data which can be used to more accurately assess and subsequently combat the fire problem at the national level. The NFIRS began with six states participating in 1976 and has grown to forty-two states that participate as of 1994 (see table 1). Over half of all fire service agencies in this country report their statistics to the National Fire Data Center and enjoy the previously mentioned reciprocal benefits which are a part of the program.

The transition to the NFIRS has not been without its "rocky" moments. Gary Ludwig (1992) in his book entitled, *Computers in the EMS and Fire Service*, writes;

Since its creation, NFIRS has faced occasional rough times, and has survived and grown in spite of them. But, if the system is to continue its progress in the

Table-1 FIRE DEPARTMENTS REPORTING TO NFIRS - 1994

(Fire in United States: 1985-1994, pg. 22)

Participating State	No. of Participating Fire Departments	No. of Fire Depts. in State	% of Reporting Depts.
Alabama	1	1,072	0.1
Alaska	78	253	31
Arizona	5	258	2
Arkansas	355	824	43
California	373	1153	32
Colorado	25	400	6
Connecticut	215	274	78
Dist. Of Columbia	1	1	100
Florida	330	674	49
Georgia	151	718	21
Idaho	157	214	73
Illinois	884	1330	66
Iowa	539	869	62
Kansas	557	674	83
Kentucky	474	794	60
Louisiana	376	700	54
Maryland	355	370	96
Massachusetts	326	364	90
Michigan	925	1030	90
Minnesota	650	821	79
Montana	208	551	38
Nebraska	299	483	62
New Hampshire	85	253	34
New Jersey	385	788	49
New Mexico	1	359	0.3
New York	1647	1809	91
Ohio	906	1300	70
Oklahoma	504	857	59
Oregon	329	325	100
Rhode Island	45	81	56
South Carolina	157	655	24
South Dakota	221	343	64
Tennessee	189	655	29
Texas	526	2000	26
Utah	121	211	57
Vermont	113	252	45
Virginia	438	702	62
Washington	53	655	8
West Virginia	428	442	97
Wisconsin	222	901	25
Wyoming	109	252	43

TOTAL	13,763	26,667	52
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face of increasing competition for public revenues and growing budgetary crises throughout the government sector, NFIRS must take full advantage of available information technology and streamline its operation to the highest degree possible (Ludwig, 1992).

Other State Experiences:

There are some lessons which can be learned from other state experiences with respect to joining the NFIRS. The State of Maine for example has been a supporting member of NFIRS in the past but ceased participation only to again work at rejoining the system. Michael Sturgeon (1994) in his EFOP paper entitled, *NFIRS in Maine: What Does the Fire Service Think?*, outlined the problem which faced Maine in the early 1990's, he writes;

The NFIRS was developed and running in 1976. The State of Maine joined the NFIRS soon after. The Maine Fire Incident Reporting System (MFIRS) suffered many growing pains, including diminishing support from the Office of the Fire Marshal and a decreasing number of reporting fire departments. Overwhelmed by problems, the MFIRS program folded in 1992. The problem now facing the fire executive in Maine is that there is no longer a standardized fire incident reporting system in the state (Sturgeon, 1994).

It is clear based on the State of Maine's experience that significant proactive research be done to assure that the Office of the State Fire Marshal in Alabama and the Alabama fire service organizations will be supportive of the effort to join the NFIRS. It must be a cooperative effort between these two entities with help from the USFA to assure a

successful outcome. James Morin (1994) echoes this strategy in his EFOP paper entitled, *Reestablishing the Maine Fire Incident Reporting System*, he writes;

...It is recommended that the State Fire Marshal's Office form a working team -- being inclusive of the fire service ---to evaluate the past failure of the Maine Fire Incident Reporting System (MFIRS) and seek assistance from the United States Fire Administration to get MFIRS up and running once again (Morin, 1994).

Robert Delgado (1993) in an article in *Fire Chief Magazine*, June, 1993 entitled, *Facts and Figures at Your Fingertips*, further makes the point of the value of NFIRS and suggests a broad approach toward adopting the system. He writes;

NFIRS is clearly a valuable management tool for the fire service. If you have NFIRS in your department, ask yourself if you're using it--really using it--to manage the department. If you don't have NFIRS, ask yourself why. Or better yet, you might want to ask your state--it may well be that officials are just waiting to hear you say you want it.

In state after state, NFIRS was installed where it was wanted, often initiated by the state fire marshal, but sometimes in response to the requests of the fire departments (Delgado, 1993).

PROCEDURES

Research Methodology:

The desired outcomes of this project were:

- to research and determine the problems other states have experienced regarding joining the NFIRS
- to determine through statistical analysis how the over one thousand fire service agencies within the State of Alabama feel about joining the NFIRS
- to determine if there would be unity or divisiveness with respect to the paid, combination and volunteer segments of the fire service in the overall effort to join the NFIRS
- to identify and determine if other stakeholders within the state would support or oppose the project

With a favorable information base from the above desired outcomes, the overall objective of the project is to get the State of Alabama to formally join the National Fire Incident Reporting System; thereby, giving the City of Mountain Brook Fire Department the means to report to NFIRS.

This project involved primarily descriptive research utilizing existing data/material on the subject of the National Fire Incident Reporting System with additional local data being supplied via a state-wide survey instrument which was sent to over one thousand fire service agencies.

NFIRS Focal Point Strategy:

As previously stated the National Fire Data Center looks to have only one focal point to collect and transmit state data to the fire data center, and since the majority of states handle this task through the state fire marshal's office, this was the first stakeholder that was contacted. John Robison, the State Fire Marshal, was approached by myself as

Chairman of the Alabama Association of Fire Chiefs (AAFC) Administrative Committee in January of 1998 and the subject of national reporting was broached. Mr. Robison was interested in the idea, but made it understood that there would have to be broad support from the fire service in general.

Survey Instrument:

Will the fire service agencies across the State of Alabama support joining the NFIRS? Will there be a difference between how the paid, volunteer and combination departments view the efforts to adopt the NFIRS as the standard? These are important questions because if the Alabama fire service is not in favor of adopting the NFIRS then the amount of information that would be available for analysis would probably be statistically insignificant. Voluntary compliance by a major percentage of departments within the state therefore is of vital importance.

What is the best mechanism for answering the questions raised above: a survey instrument. A survey instrument was developed by the AAFC Administrative Committee (see Appendix A) and administered to all fire service agencies within the state. The State Fire Marshal's office served as the mail-out and collection point for the survey instruments and the AAFC Admin. Committee analyzed and reported the survey results.

Survey Strengths and Limitations:

The State of Alabama has 1,072 fire service organizations from the paid, volunteer and combination organizational makeup. A survey instrument complete with a self-addressed envelope was mailed to each department. Since the entire fire service population was surveyed, the analysis output generated from the instruments will not be

bound by random sampling shortcomings with respect to the validity of a sampling process.

There was four hundred ninety-five (495) survey instruments returned from the 1,072 which were mailed. This represents a return rate of 46.17%. Based on this excellent response rate, it can be stated with statistical significance that the information generated from the survey represents the general opinions of the entire fire department population within the State of Alabama as it relates to the National Fire Incident Reporting System. The data from the survey instrument was entered into a statistical software program (SPSS 5.0), and descriptive and frequency statistics were derived and the analysis presented (Appendix B).

The survey analysis was put in narrative format and shared via written correspondence with the State Fire Marshal on March 25, 1998 (Appendix C). The overall assessment looked very promising. Over 70% of the departments that participated in the survey process agreed to join the NFIRS system.

Marketing:

After the survey was performed and analyzed, a marketing plan was put together. The plan was to keep the subject of NFIRS current and on the minds of as many fire chiefs in the State as possible. Newsletter articles were written and published in several of the fire fighter and fire chief organizational newsletter venues (see Appendix D). Andrew Fritz (1992) in his paper entitled, *Increasing Fire Department Participation in NFIRS in New Jersey* concurs with this marketing concept. He writes;

....If the fire service is to increase the number of fire departments which participate in NFIRS, it must actively market the system. This should be done in a variety of ways including regular contact with fire chiefs through direct mailings and seminars (Fritz, 1992).

RESULTS

Below are listed the survey questions which were administered to the Alabama fire service organizations. The corresponding analysis of the survey is also listed. A frequencies distribution and descriptive statistics are given where applicable.

Question: What is the approximate population of the community you serve?

The community populations represented by the various departments were grouped. The results were:

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Cum Percent
LESS THAN 5000	1	379	76.6	76.7	76.7
5001 THRU 10000	2	51	10.3	10.3	87.0
10001 THRU 20000	3	31	6.3	6.3	93.3
20001 THRU 50000	4	23	4.6	4.7	98.0
GREATER THAN 50000	5	10	2.0	2.0	100.0
.	1		.2	Missing	
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	495	100.0	100.0	

By far, the population group most represented in the returned survey information was the <5,000 group. Almost 77% of the respondents serve areas with populations in this range. Most of the respondents were from volunteer organizations (78.5%), and most of the volunteer organizations in Alabama represent the smaller population groups; therefore, it is understandable why this population group is well represented.

Question: Which of the following best describes your fire service organization?

A breakout of the results is as follows:

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
ALL PAID	1	43	8.7	8.7	8.7
COMBINATION PAID/VOL	2	63	12.7	12.8	21.5
ALL VOL	3	388	78.4	78.5	100.0
.	.	1	.2	Missing	
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	495	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

The data shows that the majority of the respondents were from the volunteer sector of the fire service (78.5%) and that the next highest sector was the combination sector with a showing of 12.8%. The all paid departments made up the least represented sector of the respondents with a 8.7% rate.

Question: Does your organization currently use the NFIRS for incident reporting?

Frequencies distribution revealed:

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
YES	1	52	10.5	10.5	10.5
NO	2	384	77.6	77.7	88.3
DO NOT KNOW	3	58	11.7	11.7	100.0
.	.	1	.2	Missing	
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	495	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

The data clearly demonstrates that only a few of the many fire service agencies in the State of Alabama currently use the NFIRS (10.5%). Moving the entire State toward this reporting system therefore will be a change to the majority of the existing agencies.

Question: How does your organization currently process incident reports?

The survey results revealed:

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Cum		
			Percent	Percent	Percent
COMPUTER SOFTWARE	1	79	16.0	16.0	16.0
HAND OR TYPE WRITTEN	2	415	83.8	84.0	100.0
.	.	1	.2	Missing	
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	495	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

An important consideration in trying to move the State of Alabama fire service toward the NFIRS was to define the existing computer capability of the fire service agencies. In other words if the majority of the state was already using computers to process incident reports, then the move would only require software changes and not both hardware and software training and purchasing. The data showed that the majority of the agencies use typewritten or handwritten reporting (84%); therefore, computer acquisition will be a major part of the program.

Question: If your organization uses the NFIRS format and processes reports on a computer, does your software have the current capability to export the information to a floppy disk via modem in the correct format so that the state can use the information to report to the USFA?

Frequencies distribution revealed that:

Valid Cum

Value Label Value Frequency Percent Percent Percent

YES	1	43	8.7	8.7	8.7
NO	2	217	43.8	43.9	52.6
DO NOT KNOW	3	234	47.3	47.4	100.0
	.	1	.2	Missing	
		-----	-----	-----	
Total		495	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

The results of this data shows that very few of the departments that responded were currently export capable (8.7%). What was further gleaned from the data is that there is a great number of departments which do not know what there capabilities are (47.4%); therefore, there will have to be a significant effort at educating computer users to make the program a success.

Question: If the State of Alabama were to make it possible to gather fire incident information in the NFIRS format to generate statistics about fire in Alabama and to report these statistics to the United States Fire Administration, would you be interested in utilizing this system and participating in the program?

A frequencies distribution revealed that:

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid	Cum
				Percent	Percent
YES	1	356	71.9	72.1	72.1
NO	2	31	6.3	6.3	78.3
DO NOT KNOW	3	107	21.6	21.7	100.0
	.	1	.2	Missing	
		-----	-----	-----	
Total		495	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

The data from this question is perhaps the most crucial of all data received. This question was designed to find out if Alabama's fire service is ready to support the move to

join the NFIRS. Over 72% responded favorably. Only 6.3% responded with a negative reply. An interesting number was the size of the group that did not know what they wanted to do (21.7%). Overall the data from this question is enough to get the program started, because the interest is definitely present.

Question: If funding was made available to help purchase computer software for your organization, would you be willing to report using the NFIRS format and send annual fire data to the State of Alabama via a computer system?

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent			Cum Percent	
			Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
YES	1	375	75.8	75.9	75.9		
NO	2	21	4.2	4.3	80.2		
ALREADY HAVE AND WOULD	3	15	3.0	3.0	83.2		
DO NOT KNOW	4	83	16.8	16.8	100.0		
.	.	1	.2	Missing			
		-----	-----	-----			
	Total	495	100.0	100.0			

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

Funding is always an issue, but it tends to be even more an issue in the volunteer sector of the fire service in Alabama. One of the concerns was that there might not be a wide acceptance of the program if departments had to expend funds to purchase computers. There was not a great variance between those that stated they were willing to support the NFIRS program and those that said they would support the program if funding was made available. The significance is that there is support for the program even if funding is not associated.

DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

It is quite clear that the relationship between the fire service agencies within a NFIRS state and the office of the state fire marshal must be solid. This relationship with respect to NFIRS is a mutually beneficial relationship. The fire marshal's office needs the information to help determine the fire problem within the state and therefore puts forth the organizational effort to receive and process the data; the fire service agencies need the information for their own programs and projects and therefore must be willing to submit the data to the state fire marshal's office.

Apparently, the relationship between the State of Maine Fire Marshal's Office and the fire service agencies within that state were strained at one point because of the demands of recording the fire department data on the part of the Fire Marshal, and a lack of statistical reporting as a feedback effort by the State Fire Marshal. James Morin (1994) states;

MFIRS grew larger and placed additional demands on the State Fire Marshal's Office. Faced with increased demands on services, less time was available to dedicate to the MFIRS. Eventually, statistical reporting of all the data that had been supplied by the fire departments soon became sporadic and incomplete. Some departments that had joined the MFIRS effort with enthusiasm began to lessen their support. Some even stopped their data entry, citing a lack of feedback from the State (Morin, 1994).

It would seem that in Maine's case, the State Fire Marshal's Office was heavily involved in entering data which was supplied in paper form from contributing fire service agencies. This meant that precious staff hours had to be dedicated to this data entry and

therefore the State Fire Marshal's Office was forced to look at overall priorities to see what work would get done and what work would have to be put on the "back burner". Obviously, MFIRS was put on the back burner and the program suffered accordingly. It would seem based on Maine's experience that a stipulation by the State Fire Marshal's Office that they only accept data through computer import/export means or via floppy disks could alleviate such problems in the future.

The fire service agencies in the State of Maine were keenly interested in participating in the MFIRS even after the system folded. Over 86% of the fire departments in Maine surveyed in 1994 reported that they would participate in a state-wide information system which was NFIRS based (Sturgeon, 1994). The conclusions drawn from this data coupled with the Fire Marshal's experience of having to enter data suggests that technology in the form of electronic reporting of data from fire service agencies could potentially solve Maine's reporting problem.

The lessons learned from the State of Maine's experience with the MFIRS are very pertinent to the current project of getting the State of Alabama on-board with reporting to the NFIRS. The survey data shows that like Maine (86%), Alabama (72%) fire service agencies are keenly interested in becoming a part of the National Fire Incident Reporting System. Additionally, like Maine, the State of Alabama Fire Marshal is interested in serving as the focal point for the collection and reporting of Alabama's fire service data. Since the survey data and circumstances are so very similar, it would seem prudent for the State of Alabama to look at technology as the key to making the project a success and to steer clear of any "hard copy" reporting from participating fire service agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on literature review, survey analysis performed in the State of Maine, survey analysis performed in the State of Alabama, and interaction with the Alabama State Fire Marshal, recommendations are:

- that the Alabama Association of Fire Chiefs (AAFC) Administrative Committee meet with the State Fire Marshal and share the lessons learned from other NFIRS states such as the State of Maine, so that the same mistakes will not be repeated; and
- that the proposed Alabama Fire Incident Reporting System be fully computer integrated so that fire department data can be sent to the State Fire Marshal via modems or mailed floppy disks; and
- that in order to not over-burden the Office of the State Fire Marshal, no hard copy data be accepted from fire service agencies; and
- that due to the overwhelming majority of departments wishing to voluntarily provide data to a NFIRS program (74%), there not be a mandate for all state fire service agencies to join, and
- that the Director of the United States Fire Administration, National Fire Data Center and the President of the National Fire Information Council (NFIC) be involved and utilized in the Alabama program development, and
- the AAFC should market the benefits of the NFIRS in its newsletter and at conferences.

In closing, it should be remembered that the Mountain Brook Fire Department is a small organization with a big plan. This plan is to have local response data included with other state fire service data which in turn supports the national data base. In order for this plan to become a reality it must be communicated and heard on a higher plane. This higher plane is the state level; therefore, planning and implementation efforts should be directed at this level.


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APPENDIX A
(SURVEY INSTRUMENT)

**FIRE SERVICE INCIDENT REPORTING SURVEY
FOR THE STATE OF ALABAMA**

**Please complete the following survey by March 1, 1998
and return in the provided self addressed envelope**

1. What is the approximate population of the community you serve?
2. Which of the following best describes your fire service organization:
1. All paid 2. Combination Paid/Volunteer 3. All Volunteer
3. Does your organization currently use the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) incident reporting? 
1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't Know
4. How does your organization currently process incident reports?
1. Computer software 2. Hand/Type written
5. If your organization uses the NFIRS format and processes reports on a computer, does your software have the current capability to export the information to a floppy disk or via modem in the correct format so that the state can use the information to report to the United States Fire Administration?
1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't Know
6. If the State of Alabama were to make it possible to gather fire incident information in the NFIRS format to generate statistics about fire in Alabama and to report these statistics to the United States Fire Administration, would you be interested in utilizing this system and participating in the program?
1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't Know
7. If funding was made available to help purchase computer software for your organization, would you be willing to report using the NFIRS format and send annual fire data to the State of Alabama via a computer system?
1. Yes 2. No 3. Already have Software and would participate 4. Don't Know
8. Please list the name and address of your organization:
Org. Name:
Street Address:
City & Zip Code:



FIRE SERVICE INCIDENT REPORTING WITHIN THE STATE OF ALABAMA

Dear Fire Service Provider:

The Alabama Association of Fire Chiefs in conjunction with the State Fire Marshal's Office has initiated a joint project with respect to fire service incident reporting within the State of Alabama. This joint initiative has the overall goal of moving Alabama fire service organizations toward **voluntarily** reporting via the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). The NFIRS has two objectives: to help State and local governments develop fire reporting and analysis capability for their own use, and to obtain data which can be used to more accurately assess and subsequently combat the fire problem at a national level.

Some facts regarding the National Fire Incident Reporting System are:

- **The NFIRS represents the world's largest national annual database of fire incident information.**
- **State participation in NFIRS is voluntary**
- **Forty-two states and the District of Columbia report NFIRS data.**
- **Approximately 14,000 fire departments participate in the NFIRS nationally.**
- **The NFIRS offers a standardized method of incident reporting (a dumpster fire in Alabama will get reported the same as a dumpster fire in California).**

The first step in this project is to gather information about the current reporting capabilities of fire service organizations within the State. A brief survey instrument has been developed for this purpose. **We ask that you please take a few minutes of your time to complete the attached survey and place it in the provided self-addressed envelope for mailing before March 1, 1998.**

Your input is critical! Decisions will be made from the analysis of the survey information.

We thank you in advance for your time and attention with respect to this very important project.

**APPENDIX B
(ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA)**

DATA LIST FILE 'C:\STUFF\SURVEY1.TXT' FIXED /
 POP 1-6 ORG 8 NFIRS 10 PROCESS 12 EXPORT 14 WILLING 16
 FUNDING 18.
 VAR LAB POP 'POPULATION OF COMMUNITY' ORG 'TYPE OF ORGANIZATION'
 NFIRS 'CURRENTLY USE NFIRS' PROCESS 'HOW CURRENTLY PROCESS INFO'
 EXPORT 'CURRENTLY EXPORT CAPABLE' WILLING 'WILLING TO USE NFIRS'
 FUNDING 'FUNDING FOR SOFTWARE'.
 VAL LAB ORG 1 'ALL PAID' 2 'COMBINATION PAID/VOL' 3 'ALL VOL'.
 VAL LAB NFIRS 1 'YES' 2 'NO' 3 'DO NOT KNOW'.
 VAL LAB PROCESS 1 'COMPUTER SOFTWARE' 2 'HAND OR TYPE WRITTEN'.
 VAL LAB EXPORT 1 'YES' 2 'NO' 3 'DO NOT KNOW'.
 VAL LAB WILLING 1 'YES' 2 'NO' 3 'DO NOT KNOW'.
 VAL LAB FUNDING 1 'YES' 2 'NO' 3 'ALREADY HAVE AND WOULD' 4 'DO NOT
 KNOW'.
 RECODE POP (1 THRU 5000=1) (5001 THRU 10000=2) (10001 THRU 20000=3)
 (20001 THRU 50000=4) (50000 THRU HIGHEST=5).
 VAL LAB POP 1 'LESS THAN 5000' 2 '5001 THRU 10000' 3 '10001 THRU 20000'
 4 '20001 THRU 50000' 5 'GREATER THAN 50000'.
 FREQUENCIES ALL.
 The raw data or transformation pass is proceeding
 495 cases are written to the compressed active file.

 Page 3 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

***** Memory allows a total of 17873 Values, accumulated across all Variables.
 There also may be up to 2234 Value Labels for each Variable.

 Page 4 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

POP POPULATION OF COMMUNITY

Value Label	Value	Valid Frequency	Cum Percent	Percent	Percent
LESS THAN 5000	1	379	76.6	76.7	76.7
5001 THRU 10000	2	51	10.3	10.3	87.0
10001 THRU 20000	3	31	6.3	6.3	93.3
20001 THRU 50000	4	23	4.6	4.7	98.0
GREATER THAN 50000	5	10	2.0	2.0	100.0
.	1	.2	Missing		

Total	495	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

 Page 5 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

ORG TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

Value Label	Value	Valid		Cum		Percent
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent	
ALL PAID	1	43	8.7	8.7	8.7	
COMBINATION PAID/VOL	2	63	12.7	12.8	21.5	
ALL VOL	3	388	78.4	78.5	100.0	
.	1	.2	Missing			
Total		495	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

Page 6 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

NFIRS CURRENTLY USE NFIRS

Value Label	Value	Valid		Cum		Percent
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent	
YES	1	52	10.5	10.5	10.5	
NO	2	384	77.6	77.7	88.3	
DO NOT KNOW	3	58	11.7	11.7	100.0	
.	1	.2	Missing			
Total		495	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

Page 7 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

PROCESS HOW CURRENTLY PROCESS INFO

Value Label	Value	Valid		Cum		Percent
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent	
COMPUTER SOFTWARE	1	79	16.0	16.0	16.0	
HAND OR TYPE WRITTEN	2	415	83.8	84.0	100.0	
.	1	.2	Missing			
Total		495	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

Page 8 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

EXPORT CURRENTLY EXPORT CAPABLE

Valid Cum

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent
YES	1	43	8.7	8.7	8.7
NO	2	217	43.8	43.9	52.6
DO NOT KNOW		3	234	47.3	47.4
.	1	.2	Missing		100.0

Total		495	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

Page 9 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY

2/2/99

WILLING WILLING TO USE NFIRS

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
YES	1	356	71.9	72.1	72.1
NO	2	31	6.3	6.3	78.3
DO NOT KNOW		3	107	21.6	21.7
.	1	.2	Missing		100.0

Total		495	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

Page 10 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY

2/2/99

FUNDING FUNDING FOR SOFTWARE

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
YES	1	375	75.8	75.9	75.9
NO	2	21	4.2	4.3	80.2
ALREADY HAVE AND WOU		3	15	3.0	3.0
DO NOT KNOW		4	83	16.8	16.8
.	1	.2	Missing		100.0

Total		495	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 494 Missing cases 1

Page 11 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY

2/2/99

This procedure was completed at 10:23:56
 PROCESS IF ORG =1.
 FREQUENCIES ALL.

***** Memory allows a total of 17873 Values, accumulated across all Variables.
There also may be up to 2234 Value Labels for each Variable.

Page 12 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

POP POPULATION OF COMMUNITY

Value Label	Value	Valid		Cum	
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent
LESS THAN 5000	1	3	7.0	7.0	7.0
5001 THRU 10000	2	6	14.0	14.0	20.9
10001 THRU 20000	3	9	20.9	20.9	41.9
20001 THRU 50000	4	15	34.9	34.9	76.7
GREATER THAN 50000	5	10	23.3	23.3	100.0

Total	43	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 43 Missing cases 0

Page 13 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

ORG TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

Value Label	Value	Valid		Cum	
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent
ALL PAID	1	43	100.0	100.0	100.0

Total	43	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 43 Missing cases 0

Page 14 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

NFIRS CURRENTLY USE NFIRS

Value Label	Value	Valid		Cum	
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent
YES	1	20	46.5	46.5	46.5
NO	2	23	53.5	53.5	100.0

Total	43	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 43 Missing cases 0

Page 15 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

PROCESS HOW CURRENTLY PROCESS INFO

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
COMPUTER SOFTWARE	1	26	60.5	60.5	60.5
HAND OR TYPE WRITTEN	2	17	39.5	39.5	100.0

Total	43	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 43 Missing cases 0

Page 16 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

EXPORT CURRENTLY EXPORT CAPABLE

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
YES	1	15	34.9	34.9	34.9
NO	2	12	27.9	27.9	62.8
DO NOT KNOW	3	16	37.2	37.2	100.0

Total	43	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 43 Missing cases 0

Page 17 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

WILLING WILLING TO USE NFIRS

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
YES	1	40	93.0	93.0	93.0
NO	2	1	2.3	2.3	95.3
DO NOT KNOW	3	2	4.7	4.7	100.0

Total	43	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 43 Missing cases 0

Page 18 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

FUNDING FUNDING FOR SOFTWARE

Valid Cum

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent
YES	1	33	76.7	76.7	76.7
ALREADY HAVE AND WOU		3	5	11.6	11.6
DO NOT KNOW		4	5	11.6	11.6
					100.0

Total	43	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 43 Missing cases 0

Page 19 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

This procedure was completed at 10:24:00
PROCESS IF ORG=3.
FREQUENCIES ALL.

***** Memory allows a total of 17873 Values, accumulated across all Variables.
There also may be up to 2234 Value Labels for each Variable.

Page 20 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

POP POPULATION OF COMMUNITY

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
LESS THAN 5000	1	354	91.2	91.2	91.2
5001 THRU 10000	2	26	6.7	6.7	97.9
10001 THRU 20000	3	6	1.5	1.5	99.5
20001 THRU 50000	4	2	.5	.5	100.0

Total	388	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 388 Missing cases 0

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ORG TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
ALL VOL	3	388	100.0	100.0	100.0

Total	388	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 388 Missing cases 0

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NFIRS CURRENTLY USE NFIRS

Value Label	Value	Valid		Cum		Percent
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent	
YES	1	12	3.1	3.1	3.1	
NO	2	320	82.5	82.5	85.6	
DO NOT KNOW		3	56	14.4	14.4	100.0

	Total	388	100.0	100.0	
Valid cases	388	Missing cases	0		

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PROCESS HOW CURRENTLY PROCESS INFO

Value Label	Value	Valid		Cum		Percent
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent	
COMPUTER SOFTWARE	1	25	6.4	6.4	6.4	
HAND OR TYPE WRITTEN	2	363	93.6	93.6	100.0	

	Total	388	100.0	100.0	
Valid cases	388	Missing cases	0		

Page 24 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

EXPORT CURRENTLY EXPORT CAPABLE

Value Label	Value	Valid		Cum		Percent
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent	
YES	1	11	2.8	2.8	2.8	
NO	2	180	46.4	46.4	49.2	
DO NOT KNOW		3	197	50.8	50.8	100.0

	Total	388	100.0	100.0	
Valid cases	388	Missing cases	0		

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WILLING WILLING TO USE NFIRS

Value Label	Value	Valid		Cum		Percent
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent	

YES	1	260	67.0	67.0	67.0
NO	2	28	7.2	7.2	74.2
DO NOT KNOW		3	100	25.8	25.8 100.0

Total	388	100.0	100.0
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Valid cases	388	Missing cases	0
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Page 26	STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY	2/2/99
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FUNDING FUNDING FOR SOFTWARE

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
YES	1	292	75.3	75.3	75.3
NO	2	18	4.6	4.6	79.9
ALREADY HAVE AND WOU		3	3	.8	.8 80.7
DO NOT KNOW		4	75	19.3	19.3 100.0

Total	388	100.0	100.0
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Valid cases	388	Missing cases	0
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Page 27	STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY	2/2/99
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This procedure was completed at 10:24:03
 PROCESS IF ORG=2.
 FREQUENCIES ALL.

***** Memory allows a total of 17873 Values, accumulated across all Variables.
 There also may be up to 2234 Value Labels for each Variable.

Page 28	STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY	2/2/99
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POP POPULATION OF COMMUNITY

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
LESS THAN 5000	1	22	34.9	34.9	34.9
5001 THRU 10000	2	19	30.2	30.2	65.1
10001 THRU 20000	3	16	25.4	25.4	90.5
20001 THRU 50000	4	6	9.5	9.5	100.0

Total	63	100.0	100.0
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Valid cases	63	Missing cases	0
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Page 29 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

ORG TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
COMBINATION PAID/VOL	2	63	100.0	100.0	100.0

Total	63	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 63 Missing cases 0

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NFIRS CURRENTLY USE NFIRS

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
YES	1	20	31.7	31.7	31.7
NO	2	41	65.1	65.1	96.8
DO NOT KNOW	3	2	3.2	3.2	100.0

Total	63	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 63 Missing cases 0

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PROCESS HOW CURRENTLY PROCESS INFO

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
COMPUTER SOFTWARE	1	28	44.4	44.4	44.4
HAND OR TYPE WRITTEN	2	35	55.6	55.6	100.0

Total	63	100.0	100.0		

Valid cases 63 Missing cases 0

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EXPORT CURRENTLY EXPORT CAPABLE

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent
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YES	1	17	27.0	27.0	27.0	
NO	2	25	39.7	39.7	66.7	
DO NOT KNOW		3	21	33.3	33.3	100.0

Total	63	100.0	100.0		
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Valid cases	63	Missing cases	0
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Page 33 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

WILLING WILLING TO USE NFIRS

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent	
YES	1	56	88.9	88.9	88.9	
NO	2	2	3.2	3.2	92.1	
DO NOT KNOW		3	5	7.9	7.9	100.0

Total	63	100.0	100.0		
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Valid cases	63	Missing cases	0
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Page 34 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

FUNDING FUNDING FOR SOFTWARE

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent	Percent	
YES	1	50	79.4	79.4	79.4	
NO	2	3	4.8	4.8	84.1	
ALREADY HAVE AND WOU		3	7	11.1	11.1	95.2
DO NOT KNOW		4	3	4.8	4.8	100.0

Total	63	100.0	100.0		
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Valid cases	63	Missing cases	0
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Page 35 STATE OF ALABAMA NFIRS SURVEY 2/2/99

This procedure was completed at 10:24:07
FINISH.

End of Include file.

**APPENDIX C
(SURVEY NARRATIVE TO FIRE MARSHAL)**

CITY OF MOUNTAIN BROOK FIRE DEPARTMENT

100 Hoyt Lane, Mountain Brook, Alabama - 35213 Phone: (205) 802-3838, Fax:
(205) 879-6913

**Robert W. Ezekiel, MPPM
Fire Chief**

March 25, 1998

John Robinson, State Fire Marshal
P.O. Box 303352
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-3352

Dear John:

Re; NFIRS State Survey Analysis Overview

I want to begin by saying how much we appreciate your interest and efforts in working with the Alabama Association of Fire Chiefs on this worthwhile project. The surveys have been steadily coming in, and we have been entering the information in our statistics program so that we can get a good look at where we stand.

As of this date, there have been 410 survey instruments returned and entered into the data base. This represents a return rate of 37.3% (1,100 departments). Based on this return, I believe that we can state with statistical significance that the information generated from the survey represents the general opinions of the entire fire department population within the State.

I know that you have probably been wondering about the results of the survey so please find listed below the analysis as it currently stands.

- The community populations represented by the various departments were grouped.
The results are:

Less than 5,000-----	74.1%
5,001 - 10,000-----	11.0%
10,001 - 20,000-----	7.1%
20,001 - 50,000-----	5.6%
Greater than 50,000-----	2.2%

"Quality Service for a Quality City"

LETTER: JOHN ROBINSON
SURVEY RESULTS
PAGE TWO

- The survey instrument captured the type of organizations completing the survey. A breakout of this is as follows:

All Paid Departments-----10.0%
 Combination Paid/Volunteer Departments-----14.6%
 All Volunteer Departments-----75.4%

- A question was asked with respect to those organizations that currently use the NFIRS format. The results are:

Currently Use NFIRS-----11.0%
 Not Currently Using NFIRS-----77.8%
 Do not Know-----11.2%

- An important consideration regarding the project is how do most fire departments within the State currently process their respective incident reports. A summary is as follows:

Use Computer Software-----17.8%
 Use Hand/Typewritten Reports-----82.2%

- How many of the departments within the state are currently capable of exporting NFIRS information to the State?

Are Currently Export Capable-----9.5%
 Not Currently Export Capable-----43.4%
 Do Not Know-----47.1%

- If the State of Alabama Fire Service in conjunction with the State Fire Marshal's Office were to establish the NFIRS as the standard for the State, would you be supportive of this endeavor?

Willing to use the NFIRS Format-----70.2%
 Not Willing to use the NFIRS Format-----7.1%
 Do Not Know-----22.7%

- If funding for software was made available to allow each department to report to the State their respective fire data, would your department be supportive?

Would be supportive-----74.1%
 Would not be supportive-----4.9%
 Already have Software and would support-----3.7%
 Do not know-----17.3%

"Quality Service for a Quality City"

**LETTER: JOHN ROBINSON
SURVEY RESULTS
PAGE THREE**

The above results include the overall view of the survey. I have analyzed the data from the perspective of each type of organization to see how the paid, combination, and volunteer organizations felt about the proposal. I have included a copy of the computer analysis which reflects this information for your perusal.

If any additional survey instruments are received, I will make sure the data gets entered into the system. I do not believe, however, that there will be many; therefore, the analysis that I have given you should hold consistent.

Once you have digested the results of the survey, please give me a call (205-802-3838) so that we can make further plans with respect to bringing the program to fruition.

Once again, I want to thank you for your assistance, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely;

Robert W. Ezekiel

cc: AAFC Admin. Committee
Attachment

"Quality Service for a Quality City"

**APPENDIX D
(NEWSLETTER ARTICLE MARKETING NFIRS)**

“Quality Service for a Quality City”

The National Fire Incident Reporting System: An opportunity for Alabama's fire service

By Robert "Zeke" Ezekiel

In today's public sector environment, windows of opportunity often briefly present themselves to organizations only to close before the management of many of the organizations can set direction. Why is it that some organizations are able to take advantage of opportunity and others are not? The answer is that some organizations have quick access to information which can allow them to arrive at a strategic direction while the opportunity is still available, whereas, other organizations do not. Let's face it, decisions are made with information, and the organization that can get accurate information in a timely fashion, can be among the first to take advantage of opportunity.

A window of opportunity is about to open for fire service organizations across Alabama, and the opportunity will give fire service organizations the informational means they need to make strategic decisions. The opportunity is the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). NFIRS is a standardized method of reporting fire service incidents so that the information can be used in analysis at the local, state and national level.

There are forty-eight states that currently use, or are developing for use, the National Fire Incident Reporting System to report fire service incidents. Mississippi does not use NFIRS at all, and Alabama has one fire department that reports directly to the United States Fire Administration. To create the opportunity to join the other states with respect to NFIRS, a joint venture

was established between the Alabama Association of Fire Chiefs (AAFC) and the State Fire Marshal's office to get Alabama on-board with NFIRS. Since the State Fire Marshal is the focal point for the collection of fire incident data for the state, a meeting was held with John Robison, the State Fire Marshal. The fruits of the meeting led to an agreement where the AAFC would develop a survey instrument and perform survey analysis to determine where we are, and where we want to go with respect to fire incident reporting within the state, and the State Fire Marshal would provide the resources to mail out the surveys to all fire departments within the state and additionally serve as a collection point for the survey instruments.

The joint venture has worked well. There were 1,100 survey instruments mailed out, and as of April 20th, there have been 480 surveys returned. This represents a response rate of 43.6%.

A brief overview of the survey results are presented below:

- The community populations represented by the various departments were grouped. The results are:

Less than 5,000	76.7%
5,001 - 10,000	10.4%
10,001 - 20,000	6.3%
20,001 - 50,000	4.8%
Greater than 50,000	1.9%

- The survey instrument captured the type of organizations completing the survey. A breakout of this is as follows:

All Paid Departments	8.8%
Paid/Volunteer Departments	13.1%
All Volunteer Departments	78.1%

- A question was asked with respect to those organizations that currently use the NFIRS format. The results are:

Currently Use NFIRS	10.6%
Not Currently Using NFIRS	77.5%
Do not Know	11.9%

- An important consideration regarding the project is how do most fire departments within the State currently process their respective incident reports. A summary is as follows:

Computer Software	16.5%
Hand/Typewritten Reports	83.5%

- How many of the departments within the state are currently capable of exporting NFIRS information to the State?

Currently Export Capable	8.8%
Not Currently Export Capable	43.5%

Do Not Know	47.7%
-------------	-------

- If the State of Alabama Fire Service in conjunction with the State Fire Marshal's Office were to establish the NFIRS as the standard for the State, would you be supportive of this endeavor?

Willing to use the NFIRS	71.7%
Not willing to use the NFIRS	6.5%
Do Not Know	21.9%

- If funding for software was made available to allow each department to report to the State their respective fire data, would your department be supportive?

Would be supportive	75.2%
Would not be supportive	4.4%
Have software & will support	3.1%
Do not know	17.3%

As you can see by the survey results, the window of opportunity is set to open. Fire service organizations across the state must now be willing to embrace this opportunity so that the "fire problem" in their community and in the state as a whole can be defined and compared in standard terms with other areas of the country. In the "age of information," it is time for the Alabama fire service to step out and become a part of this national effort.

For more information regarding the National Fire Incident Reporting System, contact: FEMA United States Fire Administration 16825 South Seton Avenue

Chief Robert "Zeke" Ezekiel has been in the fire service for 25 years. He is the Fire Chief for the City of Mountain Brook. He holds an Associates degree in Fire Science, a Bachelors degree in Public Safety Administration, and a Masters degree in Public Sector/Private Sector Mgmt. As chairman of the AAFC Admin. Committee, he has been diligently working with others to get Alabama on-board with NFIRS.